

# **Book Proposal: *Subcultures: Cultural History and Social Practice***

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This book will recast the way subcultures have been, and are, understood. There have only been a handful of books published about subcultures over the last thirty or so years, the most influential of which was, of course, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Hebdige's study has often since been unfairly maligned, but it is true that its range is limited: both historically (it has no historical perspective) and in terms of subcultural coverage (his interest is really only in British punk identity). His 'semiotic' approach has also been much criticised by sociologists, amongst others. More recently, there have been a couple of books on subcultures which have attempted to retrieve a sociological perspective: Muggleton's *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (2000) and Jenks's *Subculture: The Fragmentation of the Social* (2005). Both books develop a (rather limited) sociological perspective on subcultures, but neither of them historicise subcultures as such. Nor is their coverage of subcultures particularly wide. Jenks, for example, barely has anything to say about actual subcultures.

It is time for a comprehensive study of subcultures that provides a historical perspective and responds to the range of subcultures out there - and the different ways in which they have been studied. This book will give subcultures, and Subcultural Studies, a much-needed history. It will emphasize two of the primary ways in which subcultures have been understood. First, subcultures have been tied to a sense of 'vagabondage': outside of property and ownership, and detached from organised and official forms of labour. In their modern incarnations, subcultures are therefore often understood in relation to 'territory' (not property) and leisure (not work). The key concept here is 'deviance', and I shall work this concept through by looking at the Chicago School, criminology and the work of Michel Foucault. Second, subcultures - especially in their modern forms - are understood as a reaction against 'society' (which is alienating) and 'individualisation' (which is also alienating). The key concept here is 'community', with its accompanying sense of authenticity, the organic, the utopian. I shall work this concept through, beginning with Tonnies and Durkheim and moving on, finally, to look at 'virtual communities' online. This study will combine these two key concepts, to present a sense of subcultures as 'deviant communities'.

This book will substantially develop the themes and arrangements I put to use in the second edition of *The Subcultures Reader* (2005). Below is a list of chapter titles with listed themes/topics for discussion.

## **1. Subcultures: a vagabond history**

Rogue and vagabond literatures of the 16<sup>th</sup> century

Vagabondiana, medicant literature

Henry Mayhew

the homeless in New York: street life, the Hobo

Bohemias, artists' colonies

Hippies and New Age Travellers: Tonnies and the "community"

## **2. The Chicago School, deviance and urban ethnography**

the city: eccentricity and ecology

gangs: Thrasher and after; street corner society

from deviance to 'moral panic': from Chicago to Stanley Cohen

delinquency: from Chicago to Foucault  
graffiti writers, skateboarders and everyday life: territorialising the city

### **3. Clubs and underworlds**

Hellfire Club  
Ned Ward, Pierce Egan and others  
leisure and pleasure  
gay and lesbian clubs  
drag queens, drag kings  
S&M clubs: S&M as theory and practice  
Clubbing: rave, ecstasy, utopia

### **4. Subcultures and Cultural Studies**

Birmingham and the loss of working class identity  
Hebdige, style, refusal: against mass culture  
McRobbie and the limits of cultural studies: working class nostalgia

### **5. The literary underground**

Grub Street and the scribblers: commercial subcultures  
Pat Rogers, Robert Darnton, and others  
the pornographers  
the pulps: Literature's subculture  
comics and comic book fans: amateur/professional distinctions  
the e-zine, the fanzine  
manga, anime and Japan

### **6. Subcultures and music**

jazz: anti-structure, 'spontaneity', attitude, race and ethnicity  
punk: noise, shock, anti-commercialism  
metal: Bakhtin and misrule, the mosh pit etc.  
disco: romance, discipline, beat

### **7. Subcultures and Style**

the Dandy: Carlyle, Baudelaire: subcultural style as excess  
fashion, Simmel and others  
Zoot suiters, Hooligans, Teds: working class youth and excess  
the triumph of style over substance: beyond Hebdige

### **8. Bodies, Sex, Rituals and Belief**

tattoo communities and body adornment  
from masquerade to belief: pagan subcultures, shamanism  
wiccans: the rise of the witch in the West  
seeking the 'primitive': alternatives in the 'global underground'

### **9. Virtual communities and 'Post-subcultures'**

online subcultural identities: the persistence of 'community'.  
An analysis of recent commentaries which advocate a 'post-subcultural' future -  
arguing against this trend, which too readily gives itself over to postmodernity  
and atomization: losing the social and erasing the political/cultural/economic  
aspects of social difference.

This book will be around 75,000 in length. It will be completed in April 2006 for publication around November/December of that year.

**Note on the author:**

Ken Gelder is a Reader in English at the University of Melbourne, Australia, where he was also Head of Department in 2001 and 2002. He is author of *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994), *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Melbourne University Press, 1998; with Jane M. Jacobs), and *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (Routledge, 2004), as well as two books on contemporary Australian fiction. He is editor of *The Horror Reader* (Routledge, 2000) and the second edition of *The Subcultures Reader* (Routledge, 2005), as well as *R.L. Stevenson: The Scottish Stories and Essays* (Edinburgh University Press, 1989, 1993) and *The Oxford Book of Australian Ghost Stories* (OUP, 1994).